



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

2nd Sunday of Easter | Year C Divine Mercy Sunday



The Incredulity of Thomas: Rembrandt, 1634

1764: purchased by [Catherine II of Russia](#) (1729-1796), [Saint Petersburg](#), from Johann Ernst Gotzkowsky (1710-1775) By 1930: [Pushkin Museum](#), [Moscow](#)



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Prayer

*God of mercy,
You wash away our sins in water,
You give us new birth in the Spirit,
And redeem us in the blood of Christ.
As we celebrate Christ's resurrection
Increase our awareness of these blessings,
And renew your gift of life within us.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God forever and ever.*

[Second Sunday of Easter, Morning Prayer, Christian Prayer 452]

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
Version 2.0

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Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
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Doctrinal Sessions.

Editor: Bill Huebsch

Published cooperatively by
TeamRCIA.com and
PastoralPlanning.com.

Liturgical Context

Divine Mercy Sunday

- ▶ Pope John Paul appointed the Second Sunday of Easter *Divine Mercy Sunday*. The feast commemorates Jesus' revelations to St. Faustina who was canonized on April 30, 2000. God's mercy is especially highlighted in the readings for this day.
- ▶ The Gospel particularly highlights the mercy of God as it serves as basis and foundation of the sacrament of reconciliation—one of the ongoing sacramental expressions and experiences of God's mercy in our day. The feast is a meditation on God's compassion, mercy and benevolence—a reflection so important in light of the trials and tribulations the world is suffering and will suffer in the future.
- ▶ The entire Easter season is a remembrance made present of Christ's Paschal Mystery—the life, death, resurrection, ascension and sending of Christ's Spirit to the world. An entire season is set aside for this reflection.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 5, 12-16

- ▶ The author of Acts [Luke] was concerned with teaching the fledgling community how to live the Master's Gospel.
- ▶ The evangelist was insistent that Jesus' ministry continued with the leadership of the Twelve Apostles.
- ▶ Luke described the life of the newly formed community; all things were shared in common, there was common teaching and worship, Jesus' message--his life, his work and his miracles continued even after his death, thus validating and legitimating it for those who might question his authenticity. Indeed the reign of God--the last days--had arrived!
- ▶ Following the healing of a lame man the Apostles were prohibited from further ministry activity in the Temple; they were no longer allowed access.
- ▶ The newly formed band of persecuted believers gained strength from the witness of miracles that continued after Jesus' death.
- ▶ The Apostles ignored the ban on ministry activity and continued to do the Lord's work. They were not to be deterred—the Lord's work must continue—then and now!
- ▶ Today's reading also reminds us that a sign of the reign of God is healing. The Spirit is at work when people are healed and brought to vibrant faith in Christ.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ How might today’s reading be lived out in your world today? Have you ever been called or in what way might you be called to do the Lord’s work regardless of the consequences?

Second Reading: Revelation 1, 9-11a. 12-13. 17-19

- ▶ The Book of Revelation is an apocalyptic prophetic text. The oracles sent to the seven churches function like prophecy—not necessarily predicting or revealing the future, but professing God’s word and will in relation to it.
- ▶ The revelatory element of the book suggests that Jesus Christ reveals mysteries of the past, present and future universe.
- ▶ Traditionally an apocalypse does not receive the revelation from God or the gods, but from a go-between—an intermediary such as an angel. In the Book of Revelation the intermediary is the risen Christ.
- ▶ Two themes emerge in the book—mysteries of the cosmos and of the future, especially people’s final destination. The purpose of an apocalypse is intended to get the audience to embrace the position the apocalypse is forwarding.
- ▶ Some interpretations suggest that the book is a response to widespread persecution. Other scholars suggest that it simply refers to past persecution but is now concerned with persecution to come and with immanent judgment.
- ▶ Today’s reading warns believers about the suffering they will experience at the end of time. Believers are to remain steadfast and strong in the face of persecution that will most assuredly come in the future. Regardless of the consequences, Christians are to remain loyal to the teachings of the Lord, thus ensuring their salvation.
- ▶ John, the author of Revelation, was banished to the isle of Patmos for his fidelity to the Gospel of Christ, experiencing first hand the implications of that fidelity. He could do no less, however, than preach Christ crucified and risen regardless of the consequence. His personal experience influenced his prophetic exhortation.
- ▶ Today’s reading envisions a holy liturgy in which the faithful gather to celebrate a liturgy celebrating the Lord’s resurrection—the clarion call is sounded and the message is to go forth to the seven churches.
- ▶ Reference to the *Son of Man* has its roots first in the book of Daniel—the *son of man* was a divine-like human being that possessed God-given authority and sovereignty. Jesus used the term in reference to himself.
- ▶ The Christology of today’s reading asserts that Jesus is the glorified *Son of Man* who sits at the Father’s right hand and who will judge the human race at the end

of the age.

- ▶ The clothing described reminds us of the transfiguration and is an exhortation not to fear—all will be well, God is in control of human destiny. Believers are to persevere and not to worry.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ One thing seems certain about the Christian life. Christians can count on experiencing trials and tribulations. We will especially experience it for our efforts to live the Gospel of Christ. There is a reason we are exhorted to “take up our cross and follow Jesus.” What does this reading have to say to us about this truth and how does it relate to your life at this time in your life?

Gospel: John 20, 19-31

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
- ▶ Today’s Gospel is a story that is told in all three cycles—thus we hear it on this day every year.
- ▶ Jesus appears before the Apostles and offers his healing peace, reconciliation, faith and forgiveness.
- ▶ Jesus appears as his transformed, glorified self; time, matter and place no longer restrain him. He appears to the Twelve. He shows them his hands and his feet—they know him as their Lord and Master.
- ▶ The Incarnation of Christ continues beyond death.
- ▶ Jesus extends *shalom*—the peace of Eden. That one word is so laden with eschatological [last days/end times] overtones that it requires we spend time unpacking the fullness of meaning.
- ▶ God created the heavens and the earth (remember, Christ was present at that creation event).
- ▶ God created all things; God created human beings.

- ▶ God placed human beings in the garden. God entered into covenant with them, promising to care for them. They in turn would reciprocate by loving God with heart, mind and soul and love one another as much as self. They would also be good stewards of the created order—they would care for all living things. They would especially care for God’s anawim—the poor, marginalized and oppressed peoples who could not care for themselves.
- ▶ According to this reciprocal covenant between God and human beings all creation would live in perfect harmony in the garden. All creation would enjoy the shalom/peace of Eden—God’s original intention for the world.
- ▶ Messianic prophecy affirmed that the hoped for Messiah would usher in the kingdom of God. The hallmark of that kingdom would be the restoration of the peace of Eden.
- ▶ Jesus stands in the midst of his Apostles and ultimately says, “Peace.” In other words, I have come to restore the peace of Eden—the harmony promised at creation of the world. The covenant is fulfilled in Christ.
- ▶ One might say, “What a preposterous claim: We still have wars, he did not bring an end to division and violence—how can he make such a claim?” Indeed Jesus can make such a claim. Whenever two or more are gathered in his name and living the Gospel he came to preach then human beings are living the harmony intended for all creation—they love God, one another and in response they care for all of God’s creation—the poor, the lowly, and the created universe.
- ▶ Jesus offers his peace and forgiveness. He commissions them and sends them out to forgive others.
- ▶ Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to strengthen the community to live the peace and forgiveness he offered and commissioned them to offer to others.
- ▶ Later centuries relied on this text as basis for the sacrament of reconciliation.
- ▶ Jesus materializes a week later. This time Thomas is present. Thomas doubted that Jesus had been there—he needed proof. Jesus shows him the marks of his torture and death. Thomas professes him as the risen Lord.
- ▶ The evangelist John’s intention came full circle in this Gospel. Jesus is the divine Son who pre-existed—who was present at the creation of the world—the Word made Flesh, who was tortured, died, and rose again for the salvation of the world.
- ▶ The appearances of Jesus after his resurrection were intended to strengthen the fledgling church in the face of Jesus’ absence. All was not lost! Jesus mission continues until the end of the age!
- ▶ It continues in us. We must persevere to the end.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ In what way have you experienced the promised peace of Eden in your life? In other words, in what way, if any, have you experienced the harmony promised in the messianic kingdom of God?
- ▶ How have you experienced the promised reconciliation between peoples?
- ▶ What would be your response to those who say they have never experienced it?
- ▶ What are the implications for Christian discipleship?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

Concluding Prayer

Option 1. Celebrate a minor rite—an exorcism or blessing for catechumens: RCIA 90-97

Option 2. Pray the Prayer of Pope Clement

Option 3. Other suitable, but brief prayer. (Perhaps pray the Prayer of St. Francis.)

Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.

I trust in you: strengthen my trust.

I love you: let me love you more and more.

I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.

I worship you as my first beginning.

I long for you as my last end.

I praise you as my constant helper.

And I call you as my loving protector.

I want to do what you ask of me:

In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.

Let me love you Lord as my God.

And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.

A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.

APPENDIX

#1. One very cold night my husband and I reached out to a homeless man on our parish grounds in a former parish where I served. We offered him food and consolation and provided for his safety. The head of the parish council found out what we had done and roundly chastised us, and told us that since he was once a police officer in a large northern city that he was a better judge of what we should do with such people and in his opinion they should all be taken out and put afloat in a boat and allowed to sink. He was, of course trying to shock us and shame us because of what we had done. Both my husband and I told him that he would certainly not be the person who was going to keep us from doing what the Gospel calls us to do.

We had similar confrontation with the man when we initiated a cold night ministry in our parish gym. The same man and his cohorts objected to us giving the homeless people a blanket to take with them because, after all, they would surely litter the beaches with them and make the police force's work all the more difficult.

The situation was a reminder that the Lord's work will most surely face resistance and obstacles [even in our own communities] and that regardless of those obstacles we are not to be deterred!

#2. Contrary to the gospel of prosperity, life is not a bowl of cherries. Life is a series of ups and downs—of dying and risings. We can participate in those ups and downs and join them to the cross of Christ or we can go solo and suffer alone.

Many years ago I discovered that the ministry to which we are all called will be as effective as our willingness to embrace the Paschal Mystery in our lives—that is—our willingness to welcome the cross in our lives with the assurance that resurrection follows the cross.

There are two levels of such suffering—personal suffering and suffering for the sake of the Gospel. Jesus' primary perspective is suffering for the sake of the Gospel, but suffering offered for the sake of others can also be redemptive.

I am not often asked to suffer for the sake of the Gospel, there is no one threatening me with death for my faith. I have, however, experienced ridicule and misunderstanding. I have had personal suffering that has challenged me at times beyond my understanding, suffering that I have diligently tried to offer up—to join to the suffering Christ which our church tells us is participation in the ongoing redemption of the world. What I have learned from such suffering is that God is in the midst of it and invites complete and total reliance on him. I have learned that God invites me to look beyond the present moment to things yet unseen—to trust that suffering is transitory and that I can either grow through it or be buried by it.

My pastor has a line that always sustains me: "Suffering can either make us bitter or it can

make us better.” In the Lord’s Prayer we pray that we are not put to the test. I pray that the suffering in life not propel me to lose my mooring—I pray for the grace to abandon myself more and more to God’s providential care.

That is sometimes very difficult to do. When a family experiences severe mental illness of one of its members, it experiences a constant series of severe ups and downs—small resurrections amidst huge crosses. Just when a breakthrough seems to have occurred, another break occurs and the family is right back where they started. My constant prayer is that I not be put to the test—that I remain steadfast in the midst of seeming defeat. Hope is the greatest of gifts. Easter faith is a remembrance of things yet unseen, and dreams continually hoped for. Hopefully, a lifetime of faithfulness in the midst of life’s challenges will strengthen me/us to remain steadfast when real persecution comes.

#3. Many years ago I began ministry in a new parish. I experienced a very difficult transition. One of the groups with which I worked struggled with my arrival and was not very welcoming. One person boasted that he was going to remain in the group just to make life miserable for me. He preferred the way things were and was not happy about the change and decided he would take it out on me. Needless to say, my association with this group was trying. I knew I could do nothing on my own to change hearts. I decided that it was not my job anyway—it was God’s. Thus, I simply began to pray with and for the group. We prayed for needs; we prayed for healing; we prayed that God would be with us to guide and lead us.

Slowly, the *shalom* of Eden—the peace promised by Christ—emerged in the group. The group bonded and became aware of the needs of one another. Prayer became a primary focus and reaching out to brothers and sisters in the group formed the group as a tight knit community. Indeed the fact that we gathered in Christ’s name and experienced the presence of God—discord, division and animosity melted away.

If the world could learn from Jesus’ example, there would be no room for war and hatred. He held in his hands the answer to peace for the whole world and the world has simply remained deaf and blind to his solution.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Eucharist Series
Salvation
Sacraments
Sacrament of Reconciliation

Sacrament of Baptism
Incarnation
Revelation I
Revelation II

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the index of doctrinal topics and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

EUCCHARIST SERIES: Part II

Easter is to the year what Sunday is to the week. Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. For the next four weeks we will break open the four parts of the Mass. Today we will focus on part II, the Liturgy of the Word.

SACRAMENTS

The Paschal Mystery is made manifest in the Easter season. Easter is an appropriate time to reflect on the way in which Jesus continues his saving mission in the midst of his absence. Thus, today the doctrinal session will focus on the doctrinal issue of SACRAMENTS.

SALVATION

The Easter season manifests the salvation won by Christ's victory over sin and death. Easter is an appropriate time to reflect on Christ's saving mission. Thus, today the doctrinal session will focus on the doctrinal issue of SALVATION.

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

Divine Mercy Sunday is a most appropriate Sunday to focus on the sacrament of reconciliation. Not only is the mercy theme of this Sunday an appropriate theme, the Gospel for today's liturgy is the basis and foundation of the sacrament. Thus, today we will focus on the SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION.

SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

The Easter season is a time of reflection on the baptism of new converts to Christianity and the renewal of our baptism. Through baptism we die and rise with Christ. It is an

appropriate Easter reflection especially as we renew the promises we made or that were made for us at baptism. Thus, the doctrinal session today will focus on the sacrament of BAPTISM.

INCARNATION

Jesus' Incarnation continues after his death and resurrection in his post-resurrection appearances. While Jesus' death and resurrection is the key to salvation, it never could have happened without the mystery of the INCARNATION. Because of the INCARNATION all creation is sanctified. Because of his death and resurrection we are given access to God's life that came down to earth. The INCARNATION is a topic that is mostly addressed at Christmas, but Easter is another appropriate time to re-focus our attention on its implication. Thus, today our doctrinal session will be: THE INCARNATION.

REVELATION Part I

What better time is there than Easter season to focus our attention on God's revelation to humanity? The second reading particularly focuses on God's revelation. Today begins the two part series on REVELATION.